

VZCZCXRO2557  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHIHL RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHGB #2444/01 2531456  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 101456Z SEP 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4657  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 002444

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/09/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: SUNNI POLITICAL PARTIES FRACTURED DESPITE  
HEIGHTENED ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

REF: BAGHDAD 2105

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Gary A. Grappo for Reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Realizing they disadvantaged themselves by boycotting earlier elections and alarmed at perceived Iranian efforts to increase influence and ensure Shi'a domination of Iraqi politics, Sunni politicians are participating in large numbers in the run-up to national elections in 2010. The few coherent Sunni blocs that participated in the 2005 elections have splintered; unlike Shi'a parties, there are no national Sunni figures to help unite them. A number of new, small political parties have emerged and are feverishly negotiating with potential Sunni and Shi'a coalition partners. The potential for a sizable Sunni-dominated electoral coalition is undermined by internal Islamist-secularist fissures, the dominance of the two leading Shi'a-led blocs, and Iyad Allawi's efforts to attract Sunni parties (and independent Shi'a) into a non-sectarian alliance. While political figures claim the Iraqi public is fed up with sectarian politics, conversations with Iraqis from outside the political class are less definitive, suggesting that Sunni parties who join Shi'a-led coalitions might lose a significant part of their constituency. End summary.

#### Increased Sunni Electoral Participation

-----

¶2. (C) At the outset of the campaign for the upcoming Iraqi parliamentary elections, Iraq's Sunni community is participating more actively in the electoral process than at any time in the post-Saddam era. In contrast to the Sunni boycott of provincial elections in January 2005, sizable numbers of Sunni politicians of all stripes (including those forming a number of new parties) are preparing for the January 2010 national elections, reinforcing the positive trend displayed during the January 2009 voting for provincial governments.

¶3. (C) Motivations for the proliferation of new Sunni parties include disdain for existing political organizations, a realization that Sunnis' disadvantaged themselves by refusing to vote in earlier elections, and alarm at Iran's perceived efforts to increase its influence and ensure Shi'a domination of Iraqi politics. For example, the head of the recently-registered Iraq Assembly for Justice and Fairness, which largely comprises former insurgents and those who previously rejected political participation, told Poloffs in early August that Coalition Forces' withdrawal from cities in late-June, together with concern over Iran's meddling in Iraqi affairs, prompted the party's formation. Similarly, a North Babil sheikh and Sahwa movement leader told Poloffs that Iran's perceived efforts to dominate Iraq and advance a "Shi'a crescent" extending from Iran to Lebanon (through Iraq) helped galvanize Sunnis in Babil to form the new (Sunni-dominated) Iraqi National Unified Front party.

¶4. (C) Reflecting the desire of many Iraqis to break away from rigidly sectarian politics and related violence, most

new Sunni-led groups claim to be cross-sectarian and nationalist. Sheikh Ali Hatim al-Sulaiman al-Dulaimi, a prominent figure in the Anbar Sahwa movement, announced on August 31 the formation of the Iraqi Flags bloc, which includes Sunni and Shi'a tribal leaders, members of the Sahwa movement and independent political figures such as Yousef al-Habubi -- a Sunni who received the most votes for Governor in Shi'a-majority Karbala in 2008 and ended up as Deputy Governor following a controversial post-election deal. The influential head of the Sunni Waqf (Religious Endowment), Dr. Qinfu influential head of the Sunni Waqf (Religious Endowment), Dr. Ahmed Abdl Ghafour al-Samarra'ie, established in mid-July the Gathering of the Charter party, nominally a nationalist, cross-sectarian grouping that opposes "violence, quota-based allocation of political positions and racism." Osama al-Nujaifi, who was elected to the Council of Representatives (COR) in 2005 as a member Iyad Allawi's Iraqi National List, told Poloffs on August 18 that the al-Hadba Gathering, a Sunni group limited until now to Ninewa Province, had just registered a new party, the Gathering of Iraqi Nationalists (GIN), and was working to develop a nationalist, cross-sectarian base. Claiming that parties and coalitions that self-identify as sectarian will attract few votes, he conceded that "practical considerations" dictated that the GIN focus primarily on Sunni majority areas in Ninewa, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Diyala, Anbar and Baghdad.

#### Sunnis Remain Badly Splintered

-----

15. (C) With the formation of so many new parties, would-be electoral coalition organizers courting Sunni partners face a fractured Sunni political scene. Lacking a clear leader with

BAGHDAD 00002444 002 OF 003

national appeal within the Sunni community, the established Sunni parties and alliances have experienced significant attrition through party member defections, withdrawals and expulsions. A number of former Sunni party members have announced their intentions to form yet more new parties or alliances.

16. (C) The largest Sunni coalition, Tawafuq, previously comprised the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), the Iraqi National Dialogue Council (INDC) and the Iraqi People's Council (IPC), but has withered to the point that its current membership is drawn almost completely from the IIP. The IIP itself has split into at least two competing factions with former IIP Secretary General (SYG) and current Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi seeking to form his own party after being replaced as IIP SYG by Osama al-Tikriti. Press reports claimed on August 18 that al-Tikriti expelled two prominent IIP members of parliament, Omar al-Karbouli and Abdul Kareem al-Samarra'ie, along with some 2,000 party members accused of being Ba'athists. Further muddying the picture, former IIP member and current Deputy Prime Minister Rafi al-Issawi broke away to form the Future Gathering party; Tawafuq SYG Dhafir al-'Ani is also reportedly involved in the Future Gathering. Some informed observers believe the Future Gathering may effectively incorporate Tawafuq's remnants in the upcoming elections.

17. (C) There is a striking array in the current Sunni political dynamic of putative leaders -- notably VP al-Hashimi, DPM al-Issawi, IIP SYG al-Tikriti, and Iraqi National Dialogue Front (INDF) SYG Saleh al-Mutlaq -- vying for prominence in various notional coalitions, despite the fact that none can legitimately point to a strong support base of substantial size from within the Sunni political community. Unlike Iraqi Shi'a, who learned to organize themselves at the community level during their long national-level political disenfranchisement under Saddam, Sunnis enjoyed political domination through the monolithic Ba'ath Party and do not have a tradition of robust local organizations on which to draw in forming new political entities. Members of the Shi'a marja'ia (the leading

clerics) have also constituted a de facto center of gravity in Shi'a politics, while Sunnis largely lack comparable unifying personalities.

United We Stand?

18. (C) Sunni political entities face a host of forces that undermine the establishment of a united Sunni coalition. In addition to the absence of a strong, unifying Sunni leader and divisions between former Ba'athists and moderate Sunnis, there is also a schism between secular and religiously observant Sunnis, reflected by the demise of the Tawafuq coalition and by the substantial Sunni presence in the firmly secular, Shi'a-majority Iraqi National List (INL) led by Iyad Allawi. Moreover, following the announcement of the new Iraqi National Alliance (INA), Sunnis face a field dominated by two competing Shi'a-led coalitions, the INA and the still to be finalized group of parties led by PM Maliki. Further complicating matters is Allawi's effort to form a new non-sectarian alliance (he is reportedly in advanced talks with VP al-Hashimi and Minister of Interior Jawad al-Bolani) that could attract significant Sunni participation.

19. (C) Despite the obstacles they face, there are recent indications that senior Sunni political leaders may be able to assemble a united alliance of mostly Sunni political groups. IIP SYG al-Tikriti said on September 3 that he was helping to negotiate a broad electoral coalition to include Qhelping to negotiate a broad electoral coalition to include the IIP, INDF, al-Hadba, INL (secular) and the Constitution Party (Shi'a). In the same vein, DPM al-Issawi told Poloff on September 2 that his Future Gathering group had reached a preliminary agreement to form a coalition with Osama al-Nujaifi's GIN party and Saleh al-Mutlaq's INDF. Al-Issawi, al-Nujaifi and al-Mutlaq have been in serious discussions with Minister of Interior Jawad Bolani (Constitution Party), Allawi and VP al-Hashimi about combining forces into a single, united electoral list. Issawi believed the group would reach agreement with Bolani, who he claimed had assembled a number of Shi'a leaders (including tribal figures) in Basra, Babil and Wasit provinces under his party. Issawi further assessed that the group had a good chance of reaching agreement with Allawi and possibly al-Hashimi, but stressed that his putative coalition partners were in no hurry to finalize their alliance. He added that the group could envision allying with Maliki, but only after the election in the government formation phase.

The Maliki Option

BAGHDAD 00002444 003 OF 003

110. (C) Though neither of the two main Shi'a groupings is a particularly appealing partner for prominent Sunni political leaders, Maliki appears better positioned to form alliances with Sunni coalition partners, largely because the INA is seen as more closely tied to Iran and overtly sectarian. Sheikh Ahmed al-Rishawi, leader of the Anbar-based Muatammar Sahawwat al-Iraq (Conference of Iraqi Awakening Movements), announced August 26 that his group would run as part of Maliki's electoral coalition in the January elections. Thus far, the only Sunni support the INA has gained is from the less prominent Hamid al-Hayeis, who was promptly disowned by the Anbar Salvation Council, of which he had been a part, after declaring his decision to join the INA. Maliki's developing coalition is making strong overtures to Sunni blocs in an effort to establish a truly national non-sectarian coalition to compete in the 2010 elections. If Maliki attracts one or two moderately sized Sunni groups, his ability to appeal to the numerous small, uncommitted provincial Sunni parties to join him will be strengthened. Even INDF SYG Saleh al-Mutlaq, who is associated with supporters of the old regime, told Pol M-C that he had talked with Maliki about a coalition, but was afraid that he would

lose the votes of "Ba'athists and extremists" if he joined a coalition with the PM before the election.

#### Foreign Factors

¶11. (C) Also in the pre-election mix are widely circulated allegations of Saudi, Syrian and Iranian efforts to influence the election through financial support for political parties and material support for political violence. Such claims are taken as articles of faith: Sunnis see pervasive Iranian influence while Shi'a believe Syria and Saudi Arabia are funding Islamist extremists as a hedge against Sunnis failing to win a significant number of seats in the COR. Fear of an Iranian plot to control Iraq through wholesale meddling in the January elections is one of the few unifying factors among Iraq's Sunnis.

¶12. (C) Comment: Sunni party and coalition politics will likely remain muddled until the COR's self-imposed October 15 deadline for adopting a national elections law. Politicians will want to see what the law provides on key issues (e.g., open vs. closed electoral lists, single district vs. multiple districts) as they maneuver to maximize their chances for a strong electoral showing. A major challenge for Sunni and Shi'a politicians is assessing the extent to which Iraqis are truly fed up with sectarian politics. While political figures almost universally claim such is the case, conversations with Iraqis from outside the political class are less definitive, suggesting that the Sunni parties that join Shi'a-led coalitions might lose a significant share of their constituency (reftel). Yet if they remain fractured and opt out of Shi'a-led coalitions, Sunni parties could easily fail to reach their potential representation in the COR despite a strong voter turnout. End comment.

FORD